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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: LABOR/CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVITIES ON INAUGURATION

REF: LAGOS 368

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. A two-day nationwide strike to protest the outcome of the April elections had limited impact on the Nigerian political situation. While there were no street protests in Abuja, police in Lagos and Benin City disrupted rallies by members of the Labor and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO), arresting about fifteen activists. The former Inspector General of Police Sunday Ehindero had earlier warned that police would "crush" anyone protesting the outcome of the elections or attempting to disrupt the inauguration. The inauguration of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua proceeded in Abuja without incident. END SUMMARY.

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TWO-DAY "STAY AT HOME" STRIKE  
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12. (SBU) Nigeria's Labor and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO), made up of the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC), the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and various civil society organizations called a stay-at-home strike for May 28 and 29 to protest the conduct of the April general elections. The second day of the protest was to coincide with the Nigerian Democracy Day holiday and the inauguration of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua. According to the NLC spokesman, "The protest was a symbolic way of showing the displeasure of a majority of Nigerians over the conduct of the elections and to show that the in-coming government was illegitimate." Civil rights leaders told Poloff in separate meetings during the week of May 14 they would employ all forms of protests until they unseat the Yar'adua presidency, whom they consider illegitimate.

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INAUGURATION DAY AROUND NIGERIA  
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13. (SBU) In Abuja, the strike had little impact on either day, with stores open and normal vehicular movement observed throughout the capital. Government offices and courts were open on May 28, but banks were closed on both days. Police presence was heavy in most of Abuja, especially along access roads into the city. The

presidential inauguration was held on May 29 without incident.

¶4. (SBU) In Lagos, the Coalition mobilized union members, traders, and other categories of workers, who turned out on the streets to protest. According a TUC contact, the crowds numbered approximately ¶500. Contrary to initial indications, the Electricity Workers' Union stayed away from the strike following an agreement reached with the Federal Government to suspend the privatization of the Egbin Power Station. Though the police denied reports of widespread arrests of activists in Lagos and Edo States, the Secretary of the Joint Action Forum (JAF) and convener of United Action for Democracy (UAD), Comrade Abiodun Aremu confirmed, "five members of JAF and UAD were arrested by police on May 29 in Ikeja with a mock coffin of Obasanjo which they were bringing to the Yaba rally for a symbolic burial of Obasanjo's wicked regime."

¶5. (SBU) In Benin City, TUC estimates a crowd of approximately 500 gathered to protest on May 29 as well. A TUC representative told Poloff four union-affiliated protesters were arrested, though they were released the next day. The TUC reported "a few minor injuries" but no major incidents.

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COMMENT  
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¶6. (SBU) Given the poor levels of participation in the two-day "sit at home" strike, one is left to wonder whether the momentum for protesting the elections is lost. In addition, new causes have already begun to emerge, with NLC and TUC issuing a 14-day ultimatum to the GON on May 31 calling for the revocation of a May 26 gas price increase. TUC says the unions may call for a national strike if there is no response to the ultimatum.